



Stein Lee takes great pleasure in helping his students unlock their potential. He has been teaching math courses, including college Algebra, AP Calculus and Honors Algebra II at Central High School in Memphis since 2007.

Stein said he always wanted to teach, but took an indirect path to his new career.

He earned his PhD in 1998 with a plan to teach at the collegiate level, but two things stood in his way. First, he knew applying for a professorship would mean moving again. Second, he learned being a college professor would mean spending a lot of time writing research grants, rather than focusing on teaching.

Instead, he pursued an engineering career that took him through small businesses and big companies over nine years. He moved multiple times, was unemployed for a while – and was generally unfulfilled.

“I was working at a job in New Jersey, and there was this high school just down the street. I thought it would be awesome if I could teach,” Stein said.

At the same time, he was contemplating a move to Tennessee, his wife’s home state. As he explored his career options, he found the **Teach Tennessee** web site.

“Before I applied, I visited a few classrooms. I sat in on a few lessons, and got a sense of what running a class was really all about,” Stein explained. “This convinced me I wanted to go forward.”

He accepted as part of the 2006 cohort.

He studied a lot of options before deciding to apply, including other alternative licensure programs, but chose **Teach Tennessee**.

“Other programs have you jump through a lot of hoops, go to a lot of extra school. But Teach Tennessee’s program is one of the best. There aren’t a lot of hassles.”

Stein said Teach Tennessee’s two-week training program was intense – but made the transition to his new career as easy as possible.

“We started with education law, then they took us through real-world demonstrations, examples of how to teach,” he said. “There was a lot of group work, how to do things. I don’t think I could have been better prepared”

Beyond the initial training, Stein said **Teach Tennessee** excels in its individualized professional development plan, beginning with a mentoring program the first year.

“My mentor was a retired teacher, and she was in my class the first year for around 30 days. She was like a fly on the wall – and gave me a lot of helpful, constructive criticism.”

Stein said he first four to five months was the toughest, getting used to the volume of paperwork and learning how to manage the classroom. His advice was finding your own style.

“I’m pretty laid back,” he said. “I’m honest and have been from the beginning. Kids respect that.”

His work experience also gives him a level of “street cred” in the classroom. For example, he’s able to show kids how the equations scrawled on the board apply to real life.

“This isn’t math for math’s sake,” he said. “It’s about practical, real-world applications.”

Stein explained this is the kind of knowledge kids want – and the kind his experience makes him uniquely qualified to deliver.

“Teach Tennessee does a better job than most of screening and preparing its fellows to teach,” he said. “If you’re really committed to this new career, there’s no better program.”

“It’s the fastest way to the hardest job you’ll ever love,” Stein said.